

Was Ex-Knox Man Linked

By BILL CHILDRESS
Journal Editor

A former Knoxville resident has emerged as the leading mystery man in the latest inquiries into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

In Knoxville he was known as John Howard Bowen, who worked with underprivileged boys in this area from 1929 to 1943. Elsewhere in his far-ranging and unexplained travels he had other names and other projects.

UNDER OTHER NAME

It was under another of his names—Albert Osborne—that he became a figure in the Warren Commission's investigation of the Kennedy assassination. The fact that Albert Osborne (which apparently was his real name) and former Knoxvillean John Howard Bowen were the same man came to light as a result of continuing investigation into the Kennedy death by a national group called "Committee to Investigate Assassinations."

WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS

This organization has headquarters in

Washington, D.C., and lists 28 persons from various sections of this country as members. Included on the board of directors is Jim Garrison of New Orleans, who gained national attention with his unsuccessful attempt to prove that a conspiracy was involved in the Kennedy slaying.

The committee has no doubt that there was a conspiracy in President Kennedy's death. The group also believes there are indications of conspiracies in the slayings of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

METHODICAL APPROACH

This writer talked with a director of the committee, Bernard Fensterwald Jr., a Washington attorney who is a native of Nashville and former aide to the late Sen. Estes Kefauver. "Bud" Fensterwald also is the latest lawyer for James Earl Ray, convicted slayer of Dr. King. Ray currently is in Brushy Mountain State Prison at Petros.

The Committee to Investigate Assassinations has adopted an unobtrusive, methodical approach in efforts to unlock all

the secrets and answer all the questions relating to the three killings. It was this purpose that brought Fensterwald to Knoxville recently — namely, to look into Bowen's background.

BOWEN WAS ALIAS

A heretofore unnoticed FBI report which is part of the evidence presented to the Warren Commission established that "John Howard Bowen" was an alias used by Albert Osborne. (Reference also was made to Osborne in at least one book about the assassination, "Rush to Judgment," by Mark Lane.)

Other FBI reports established that Osborne was the man who sat beside Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President Kennedy, on his mysterious bus ride to Mexico City two months before Kennedy was slain in Dallas, Nov. 22, 1963. Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby two days later.

OTHER CONNECTIONS

Investigators also believe there were other connections between Osborne and Oswald.

It was in an interview conducted by the FBI on March 5, 1964 at the Central YMCA in Nashville that Osborne finally admitted that he also used the name John Howard Bowen. On two previous occasions he had denied having this double identity.

Osborne proved to be a difficult man to fully trace or describe, since his life had taken so many complicated and undocumented turns.

Reports from various sources pieced together this picture:

BORN IN ENGLAND

Albert Osborne was born Nov. 12, 1888, in Grimsby, England. He attended St. James Academy at Grimsby until the eighth grade. He joined the British army in 1908 and served in India, Arabia and Bermuda.

He purchased his discharge from the British army in 1914 while in Bermuda and went to Washington, D.C. He took a correspondence course in religion from the University of Chicago and later stud-

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led at the Philadelphia Bible College for a year.

This study of religion years later became the basis of Osborne's frequent role as an itinerant preacher-missionary.

WENT TO CANADA

In 1916 Osborne went to Canada and joined the Canadian Army, where he remained until the end of World War I.

Afterwards he returned to Washington, where he went into a traveling rug cleaning business with an unidentified Syrian. The two wandered throughout the United States in this venture. Osborne, who had by then started using the name Bowen, and the Syrian later parted company. Bowen-Osborne then traveled mainly in Virginia and North Carolina, working as a gardener, he told the FBI.

In 1929 he came to Knoxville, where he organized the Campfire Council, a forerunner of the present Boys' Club of Knoxville. The council's headquarters and Osborne-Bowen's residence were located at



ALBERT OSBORNE,
Alias John Howard Bow

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various places over the years—1122½ North Central Avenue, 961 North Broadway, 713½ South Gay Street, 114 Bearden Place and 312 West Vine.

VAGUE RECOLLECTIONS

There also were indications that Osborne-Bowen lived in Sevierville for a while during World War II.

Many Knoxvilleans have vague recollections of the man they knew as John Howard Bowen.

Steve Humphrey, retired associate editor of The Knoxville Journal, remembers him vividly. "I recall Bowen, who was frequently on the streets and often seeking news items, as a powerfully built man, swarthy, features somewhat like an American Indian's, who generally wore blue, double-breasted suits."

THIRSTED FOR MENTION

Osborne-Bowen's thirst for mention in the news columns of The Journal did not end with his departure from Knoxville in 1943. During the next 20 years of his travels over the South as a preacher and in Mexico as a missionary he occasionally sent The Journal letters telling of his work.

Oddly enough, The Journal even received letters about "Bowen's" adventures which were signed by "Albert Osborne."

Why this mysterious figure continued to seek publicity in Knoxville is just one of the many puzzling questions about his activity.

LETTERS TO JOURNAL

A letter dated April 7, 1958, from Dr. Martin Hidalgo (possibly another Osborne alias), told of "John H. Bowen" rescuing two small children from the path of an oncoming truck. Another letter received by The Journal, dated Sept. 11, 1961, was from "Albert Osborne." It told of "Bowen" being injured in a bus accident. Both letters appear to have been written on the same typewriter.

Osborne-Bowen spent part of his time in Laredo, Texas, New Orleans and in other Southern cities after leaving Knoxville.

For much of the period, now-ever, he was in Mexico.

The Warren Commission had some evidence that Osborne had had contact with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the bus trip to Mexico City in September, 1963. Both were tentatively linked to the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee," which was active in New Orleans, in May of 1963.

RETURNED TO CITY

Osborne returned to New Orleans shortly after his trip to Mexico City with Oswald. He received a Canadian passport there on Oct. 10, 1963 and went on a 21-day trip to Europe.

Osborne showed up in Grimsby, England, in November, 1963, unexpectedly for his family there. It was the first time they had seen him in 40 years. They had had little contact with him and knew little of his activities in the United States.

(His family's surprise was made even more curious by a postcard The Journal received from Bowen in 1954 stating he had "recently" visited England.)

Osborne told the FBI that he visited Spain after leaving Grimsby and returned to the United States Dec. 5, 1963.

Before the Nashville interview Osborne had been questioned by the FBI in Laredo, Texas and Florence, Ala. On those occasions in early 1964 he had denied being John Howard Bowen or knowing Lee Harvey Oswald.

After admitting his double identity he provided other details about his background but balked on specific questions about his activities after Sept. 1, 1963, the weeks immediately preceding President Kennedy's death.

All the investigations to date have left many gaps in the Osborne-Bowen story and an equal number of intriguing questions.

Did he, in fact, know Lee Harvey Oswald?

If so, what was the nature of their relationship?

Why did he suddenly dash off to England for his first visit home in 40 years? Where did he go after he left England?

Where did this elderly missionary get his financial support? He had no known links with an official church group. investigations to date have not uncovered any jobs he held after leaving Knoxville. But for a man with no visible means of income he traveled extensively.

These are among the questions Frensterwald and his associates hope to answer. Finding the answers may not be easy.

Their subject, Albert Osborne, alias John Howard Bowen, reportedly died about four years ago in Texas. But like the details of his life, the circumstances of his death remain clouded.

No one seems to know for sure how this mystery man died—just as no one seems to know how he lived.